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Birkbeck Perspectives

Birkbeck experts and students share their opinions on a diverse range of thought-provoking topics.

Birkbeck academic makes the 'Disability Power 100' list

Professor Martin Paul Eve (School of Arts) has been named on the Shaw Trust's 'Disability Power 100' list, which celebrates the UK's most influential disabled people. Here, he shares his own experience with a disability and speaks on both the ongoing challenging environment for the disabled community plus their heightened visibility.



Q1) What does it mean to be one of the 100 finalists, selected from over 550 nominations?

This is an important award for me. My health and disability have played majorly detrimental roles in my life and it's something I have to fight against almost every day. To be recognised as successful in spite of this is, I feel, extremely important, although celebrating the achievements of disabled people who do well should never be used as a comparator to people who aren't able to 'overcome' their own challenges to the same extent. I am fortunate, in many ways, to have got where I am and luck plays a huge role.

Q2) Shaw Trust uses the annual event to highlight how businesses, and others, can champion more opportunities for the disabled. What progress have you witnessed at Birkbeck with respect to this?

Birkbeck is committed to the Disability Confident Scheme and I applaud that, but I would like the College to go further. I have co-chaired the Staff Disability Network for the past year and it's clear that we have

the opportunity to make a step change around disability in the same way that we have seen for gender and race. But it needs people to prioritise it.

Q3) In your view, what are the most critical issues facing the disabled community in the UK?

Disabled people, or people with disabilities (this terminology is contested), face continued persecution in their day-to-day activities. This should be unacceptable in the twenty-first century. That is why I am pleased to stand up and declare my status from a position of relative privilege. The ongoing impact of the pandemic also affects this group disproportionately. It is still not safe for me to leave the house and I remain in lockdown/shielding, despite the withdrawal of government support for people in this group.

Q4) What more can we all do to address those issues?

The visibility of disabled people does a lot to help. The Paralympics, actress Rose Ayling-Ellis on Strictly Come Dancing and the Shaw Trust's list are all ways of showcasing the rich lives of disabled people, as people. But we also need a more empathetic society; one that values disabled people's lives. In the past year, 60% of deaths from the pandemic have been disabled and vulnerable individuals. Writing this off as collateral is simply barbaric.

Q5) [Disability History Month](#) is being observed later this month (18 November). What value do you see from such events and how would you like to see people getting involved?

Disability History month is an important way in which the complex historical narratives about disability can be brought to greater attention and used to alter how disability is perceived in our present. For example, not many people outside of disability studies know of the 'social model' of disability, in which disability is seen as a socially constructed phenomenon. That is, rather than a person 'having' a disability, they are disabled by society. A good example is the use of stairs instead of ramps. It's not that the person has a dis-ability to get to the top of the stairs, it's that the societal choice to use stairs rather than an accessible ramp caused the disability. Disability history month is a time when we can celebrate the achievements of the disability rights movement and use this space to educate people about issues like this.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Find out more about [Birkbeck Disability Services](#).
- [Read the news story of Professor Martin Paul Eve's shortlisting](#) for the Disability Power 100 list earlier this year.



This entry was posted in Arts, College and tagged Disability, Disability Power 100, disability support, School of Arts, Shaw Trust on November 8, 2021 [<http://blogs.bbk.ac.uk/bbkcomments/2021/11/08/birkbeck-academic-makes-the-disability-power-100-list/>] by Katrinah Best.

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